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War Revamps Textile World

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From the laboratory of the textile chemist to retail counters comes rayon acetate, used in the striking, taffeta gown above

Betty Roth surveys the future of textiles in view of shipping problems and fiber shortages

SHORTAGES in fiber supplies and unusual demands on the textile industry rapidly are becoming more apparent to the retail consumer.

Under the Good Neighbor Policy, over 13 million pounds of rayon will be exported to South America. The manufacturer who formerly used silk has substituted rayon. With these two important demands on this commodity there is bound to be a shortage. In addition, if a shortage of raw wool develops, rayon staple fiber may provide the alternative fiber for military clothing. Beginning this month, however, 12 percent of the viscose, and 6 percent of the acetate rayon supply will be allocated to the hosiery manufacturers.

Production of the nylon fiber will be affected by the shortage of phenol which is required. Fifty percent of the nylon yarns previously has been converted into part nylon apparel, such as brassieres and girdles. This commodity will be hard to obtain when the present supply is depleted. There also has been a tremendous reduction in the use of nylon for hosiery production. It is claimed that eventually there will be a complete diversion of this material from civilian to military use.

Another use of nylon is the replacement of silk in paper stock used for American money. Silk is completely out of the picture. The last of the raw material was used at the beginning of this year.

At present the cotton industry is operating at a rate never before attained. There is enough raw cotton to fill the demand now, but this may not be the case in the future. It takes one-half a bale of raw cotton per year to clothe a soldier and two-fifths a bale per year for a sailor. Last year the government purchased 15 percent of the cotton and this year, with a 5-million-man army and the present fighting forces, it is evident that the government will purchase around

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30 percent of the 1942 cotton production. In addition to this, cotton may be used as a substitute for jute and in some cases for silk and other scarce commodities.

It is patriotic to wear reprocessed or reused woollens now. In some instances woollens made of fine quality, reprocessed wool are actually better than inferior types of virgin wool. Woolen manufacturers will be cut to 30 percent of their 1941 output. Included in this amount will be the Army and Navy demands. This means less than one-half of last year's supply will be available for the civilian. Soft, casual woollens will be featured because of the need of worsteds for the Army and Navy. Some woolen imports are expected from England. A few stores in New York are featuring South American woollens of good quality and reasonable price while fashion dictators and stylists are cooperating with the government in wool conservation.

In the blanket world, the manufacturers have also been cut to 80 percent of last year's output. There is no allowance made for civilian goods in case the entire 80 percent is needed to keep our men warm. This year's government orders for blankets exceeded 10 million and the quantity used in 1940 and 1941 together was 11½ million.

Burlap supplies have been taken over by the government, as was silk, because of scarcity of jute. The only industries that can use it in limited amounts are the agricultural and chemical industries. This means that rugs, linoleum and upholsteries will have cotton or other material for backing. A new plastic fabric, saran, has high possibilities in the upholstering field. It is flexible, strong, fireproof and has unlimited rich color varieties. It can duplicate cotton, wool or rayon materials and is easily cleaned.

In answer to the rubber question comes the assurance from Washington that an allocation of rubber will be made available to the foundation garment industry for all essential needs. If the Department of Agriculture carries out the project to cultivate 75,000 acres of guayule rubber, 10 percent of our needs will be supplied in five years. Forty-five percent of the orders for bathing caps and some rubber bathing suits will be filled. These materials were already manufactured before the curtailment of rubber production began at our entrance into the war.